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ABSTRACT
        Beliefs about the c.uses of success and failure in
academic achievement were compared for students in the United States
and Israel. The following 11 attributions were placed randomly in a
questionnaire format: (1) mood; (2) skill; (3) knowledge; (4) chance;
(5) effort; (6) competence; (7) help; (8) ability; (9) task; (10)
bias; and (11) luck. Each was followed by a random ordering of five
7-point scales on the following dimensions: external-internal;
global-specific (to a particular situation);
uncontrollable-controllable; stable-uns-able; and
predictable-unpredictable. Subjects were asked to rate the
attributions. The United States sample included 50 undergraduate
education students, 50 graduate education students, 50 undergraduates
from an introductory psychology course, and 50 adults who had never
attended a college or university. The Israeli sample included 53
undergraduate education students, 80 graduate education students, 56
undergraduate psychology stude·.ts, and 50 adults without a college
background. Three-way factor analyses of variance were used for
group, sex, and attributions. Israelis were more internal than were
subjects from the United States for task difficulty and luck, and
were less predictable on task difficulty, less controllable for
competence, but more controllable for luck. In all four groups,
attributions of skill, knowledge, and luck revealed the largest
differences between the two groups. Results are discussed in terms of
the cultural views and experiences of the two populations. The rating
scale used is included. (SLD)

Semantic Differential Comparisons of Attributions and Dimensions Between U.S. and Israel

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Semantic Differential Comparisons of Attributions and Dimensions Between U.S. and Israel[1]

<u>Objectives</u>: According to Kagiteibasi and Berry's (1989) cross-cultural review of the attributional literature, "two key issues are (a) whether the basic attribution paradigm works cross-culturally, and (b) what factors are attended to in making attributions across cultures" (p. 501). This study attempts to address one aspect of the issues. Evidence from cross-national comparisons of causes for success and failure in an achievement context suggest that there are indeed differences that may be a function of national or cultural orientation (Chandler et al., 1981). Maher (1980) has suggested that achievement may be viewed differently and pursued differently. If indeed the causal attributional assignments in the research literature have an American ethnocentric bias, then it is essential that the meaning represented by a rather unique society as far as possible causal explanations are concerned. Having survived six wars since its independence, carving fertile land out of desert wasteland, managing an Entebbe rescue, and becoming a world leader in two fields of medical technology and military technology, Israel offers important lessons. If we can compare the meaning of attributions in Israel and the U.S., we might understand how an oppressed society perceives mastery and control over its own destiny rather than learned helplessness.

<u>Perspective/Theoretical Framework</u>: Contemporary attribution theory has evolved from Heider's (1958) "common sense or naive psychology" which examines "the cause-effect analyses of behavior made by the 'man in the street' . . . to determine much of our understanding of and reaction to our surroundings" (p. 16). Beliefs about the causes of success and failure, known as causal attributions, mediate between the perceptions of an achievement task and the final performance. Such attributions determine the motivation to try harder in the future. Low expectancy of success and helplessness, associated with lack of ability ascriptions, are assumed to retard achievement strivings.

<u>Method</u>: Eleven attributions (mood, skill, knowledge, chance, effort, competence, help, ability, task, bias, luck) were placed randomly in a questionnaire format. Each of these attributions was placed on a separate page of the questionnaire, followed by a random ordering of five 7-point scales on the following dimensions: external-internal, global-specific (to a particular situation), uncontrollable-controllable, stable (unchangeable)-unstable (changeable), and predictable-unpredictable. The questionnaire directions were as follows: "We are trying to determine what certain words mean to people. Here is a series of words which you are to rate on a set of 7-point scales. Circle the numeral of your choice. Remember, that there are no right or wrong answers. We are interested in knowing what you think or feel." A sample was provided and explained. In addition, each participant received a sheet of supplemental instructions that explained each of the dimensions.

<u>Data Source</u>: The U.S. participants included 50 undergraduate education students, 50 graduate education students, and 50 undergraduates enrolled in introductory psychology courses at a large midwestern university with an open-admissions policy. In addition, 50 naive individuals (over 35 years of age) who had never attended a college or university participated in the study. Half of the participants were male, and the other half were female. The Israeli sample was comprised of 53 undergraduate education students (26 males and 31 females), 80 graduate education students (34 males and 46 females), 56 undergraduate psychology students (25 males and 31 females) plus 50 naive or lay individuals counterpart to the U.S. sample and evenly divided by gender.

<u>Results</u>: Three-way factor analyses of variance were used for group, sex, and attributions. On

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all five dimensions these were significant F's (.01) for attribution and group X attribution. No sex differences were significant. Since the group X attribution interactions were significant, the simple effect of group and attributions were tested (.01) using the Tukey multiple comparison method. For the undergraduate education students, Israel was more internal than the U.S. on skill, effort, competence, help, ability, and task difficulty. Israel was more predictable than U.S. on skill, knowledge, bias, and luck and was more controllable on luck than the U.S. However, there were no significant differences on the stability and specific/globality dimensions. For the graduate education students, Israel, in comparison to the U.S., was more internal on skill, help, ability, and task difficulty, more predictable on skill and knowledge, more controllable on knowledge and luck, more stable on knowledge and effort, and more specific on chance and task difficulty. In the case of the undergraduate psychology students, Israel was more internal than the U.S. in mood, skill, effort, help, and ability, more predictable on knowledge, competence, and bias, more controllable on luck, more stable on knowledge, effort, ability, and task difficulty, and more specific on chance and bias. For the lay group, Israel was more internal on task difficulty and luck, less predictable on task difficulty, less controllable for competence but more controllable for luck than the U.S. counterpart. However, there were no significant differences on the stability or on the specific/globality dimensions. In summary, Israel was more internal than the U.S. for three of the four groups on skill, help, ability, and task difficulty, and more predictable on knowledge than the U.S. for three of the four groups. In two of the four groups, Israel was more stable on knowledge and effort and more specific on chance than the U.S. In all four groups, Israel was more controlled on luck than the U.S.

Discussion: Considering all of the groups, the attributions of skill, knowledge, and luck manifested the largest number of significant differences between Israel and the U.S. The accomplishments of Israel, in view of the odds, would attest to the importance of skill and knowledge. Luck may be reflected as an explanation for somehow managing to do the miraculous in spite of or because of war, inflation, and terrorism. The dimension of internality, in comparison to all other dimensions, was more frequently different between Israel and the U.S., suggesting that internality, a concomitant of mastery, is significantly different in Israel's society than in the U.S. The conflict between the will of God and the pride of the Jewish people--the struggle between faith and reason is more prevalent in Israel because of the preoccupation with survival. With Israel's forces locked in what seems to be perpetual conflict, danger becomes a way of life.

Significance: In contrast to what one might expect from the research literature on attributions, seldom were there average values at the extremes. This finding may be a function of a generalized tendency not to rate at extremes, or it may reflect the fact that few participants perceived the attributions as strongly in either direction. This could be a function of the specificity of each attribution. In the majority of the cases where there was a significant difference between the U.S. and Israel, the increased internality and controllability on the part of the Israeli sample suggest that this could be reflected in a greater sense of control of one's destiny and more perceived power. When one compares the number of significant differences between Israel and the U.S. within each of the four groups, there were only three for the lay groups and at the other extreme 15 for the psychology groups. Apparently, there is less variability among the lay groups than among the psychology groups, or for that matter the undergraduate education groups (11 significant differences) and the graduate education group (12). As one can see, differences cannot be directly generalized beyond the setting. If any attribution (e.g., ability or effort) is perceived as the major causal factor in performance, this can have serious implications for change in expectancy of success or failure if the attribution is perceived as more or less controllable, more or less internal, etc. How specific culture views the meaning of an attribution may help us to understand why certain attributions are used or not and in what way they are used. 4

Occupation or Major_____ Sex: M   F

Highest Grade/Degree Completed
 or Current Year in College_____ _____ Age: _____

Directions:

We are trying to determine what certain words mean to people. Here is a
series of words which you are to rate on a set of 7 point scales. Circle
the numeral of your choice. Here is an example:

POWER

Controllable   Uncontrollable

_____

   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Note that on this scale the 1 position is at the controllable end and the
7 position is at the uncontrollable end. Circling a 6 suggests that one
considers Power to be quite uncontrollable.

Remember, that there are no right nor wrong answers. We are interested in
knowing what you think or feel.

The internality-externality dimension is concerned with the source of causality. If you think the cause resides in you, then circle at the internal side of the scale. If you think the cause resides in other people or in the situation, then circle on the external side of the scale.

The control dimension is concerned with the extent of one's control or mastery over various causal factors. If you think you can control or exert mastery, then circle at the controllable side of the scale. If you think you cannot control or exert mastery, then circle on the uncontrollable side.

The stability dimension is concerned with persistence. If you think a causal factor will persist or remain unchanged over time, circle the stable side of the scale. If you think a causal factor will be transient or change over time, then circle the unstable side of the scale.

The general-specific dimension is concerned with generalizability. If you think a causal factor is generalizable to other situations or other people, then circle on the general/global side of the scale. If you think a causal factor is not generalizable, then circle on the specific side.

The predictability dimension is concerned with the ability to forecast or determine future events. If you think a causal factor can be determined or forecast, circle the predictable side of the scale. If you think a causal factor cannot be determined or forecast, circle the unpredictable side.

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BIAS

Stable
(Unchangeable)

Unstable
(Changeable)

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

General/Global

Specific (to a
particular situation)

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

External

Internal

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

Uncontrollable

Controllable

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

Predictable

Unpredictable

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

General/Global   Specific (to a
                                                                                  particular situation)

```
1           2           3           4           5           6           7
```

Uncontrollable   Controllable

```
1           2           3           4           5           6           7
```

Predictable   Unpredictable

```
1           2           3           4           5           6           7
```

External   Internal

```
1           2           3           4           5           6           7
```

Stable   Unstable
(Unchangeable)   (Changeable)

```
1           2           3           4           5           6           7
```

LUCK

Predictable   Unpredictable

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

General/Global   Specific (to a
                                                                         particular situation)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

External   Internal

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Uncontrollable   Controllable

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Stable   Unstable
(Unchangeable)   (Changeable)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

ABILITY

Predictable   Unpredictable

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

Stable
(Unchangeable)   Unstable
                                                               (Changeable)

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

Uncontrollable   Controllable

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

External   Internal

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

General/Global   Specific (to a
                                                               particular situation)

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

COMPETENCE

External   Internal

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

General/Global   Specific (to a
                                                                   particular situation)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Uncontrollable   Controllable

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Stable   Unstable
(Unchangeable)   (Changeable)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Predictable   Unpredictable

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

EFFORT

Stable (Unchangeable)						Unstable (Changeable)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Predictable   Unpredictable

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

General/Global   Specific (to a
                                                        particular situation)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

External   Internal

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Uncontrollable   Controllable

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Uncontrollable   Controllable

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

External   Internal

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

Predictable   Unpredictable

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

General/Global   Specific (to a
                                                             particular situation)

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

Stable   Unstable
(Unchangeable)   (Changeable)

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

CHANCE

Stable   Unstable
(Unchangeable)   (Changeable)

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

Uncontrollable   Controllable

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

General/Global   Specific (to a
                                                                                      particular situation)

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

Predictable   Unpredictable

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

External   Internal

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

KNOWLEDGE

External   Internal

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

Uncontrollable   Controllable

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

Stable   Unstable
(Unchangeable)   (Changeable)

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

Predictable   Unpredictable

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

General/Global   Specific (to a
                                                                            particular situation)

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

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SKILL

Uncontrollable   Controllable

_____

  1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Predictable   Unpredictable

_____

  1   2   3   4   5   6   7

General/Global   Specific (to a
                                                                            particular situation)

_____

  1   2   3   4   5   6   7

External   Internal

_____

  1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Stable   Unstable
(Unchangeable)   (Changeable)

_____

  1   2   3   4   5   6   7

External   Internal

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Predictable   Unpredictable

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Stable   Unstable
(Unchangeable)   (Changeable)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Uncontrollable   Controllable

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

General/Global   Specific (to a
particular situation)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7